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Badawin Love Affairs

RIGHTS OF IBN 'ÁM

If a girl refuses to be wedded to her *ibn 'ám*, he may slay her without becoming liable to pay blood money in compensation. 684 582

If the *ibn 'ám* knows that his cousin does not want him, being already in love with someone else, he can forbid (*haiyyir 'alaiha*) the marriage, and the girl may die a spinster.

If a girl loves another and her father dies, she has a chance of getting her freedom from her *ibn 'ám* who is *haiyyiring* her ("hajjir" is the correct technical term for keeping her to himself), if she goes and begs her freedom immediately after her father's death: "My father has died, I want thee to release me in return for my father who has passed away", she says. In such case the *hajjir* is expected to be generous and release her—but he is not bound to do so. If he refuses her only remedy is to elope. She then flees with her lover to a distant land or tribe, and there marries him after putting herself and her husband under the protection of a shaikh. She remains in constant danger from her cousin, however. Her husband is considered as guilty as a murderer and can only secure his life by the payment of blood money. [627]

Should a Badawin elope with and marry a "white slave girl" (e.g. Circassian, Georgian or Armenian) or a girl of inferior tribe (he can on no account marry a slave and defile the tribe's blood), he can never return again to his kin; they will kill him. [588]

It is the duty of every Badawin to marry and procreate. The more children he possesses, the more powerful his kinsmen. He would be expelled the tribe were he to refuse to do his duty in this respect. Without his kin a Badawin would be the most miserable of outcasts. Musil brings this out clearly in his book, *Manners and Customs of the Ruwala Bedouins*. 581

There are, of course, cases where a man sees a girl, not his cousin, and falls madly in love with her. If she herself is not bound to her *ibn 'ám* a regular courtship follows, the man finding opportunity of meeting when she is looking after the camels or the sheep, much as our own youths and maidens do. I have known very violent love affairs of this type, and the Badawin loses his head over his lass quite as much as the ordinary English youth, if not more.

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one wife. He simply cannot afford such luxury. The majority marry, of course, two or three times in their lives, either because the wife has a temper, is lazy, is unreasonable, cannot have children, or gets sick and dies; but I have known a large number who have been faithful to one woman all their lives and regard the woman of their choice with affection and trust, even when she is old and decrepit. This proves constancy at any rate, which is not far removed from love.

In spite of their religion permitting men to take more than one wife, and in spite of easy and sensible divorce laws, the standard of morality among the dwellers in hair tents is one of the highest in the world: this naturally tends towards a high standard in family life, and results in mutual admiration, companionship and trust between man and wife.

A Badawin marries primarily because he wants a helpmeet: someone to cook for him, to look after, mend and renew his tent. He must have someone to prepare his *leben*, to collect his firewood and to draw water for him and his camels. Above all, he must have children, and is only half a man until he has. Nevertheless, though he looks to the woman to be useful before everything else, there is always room for love and affection. Many cases of youths and maidens falling in love, and almost going crazed about each other, have come under my notice. It would take too long to relate them all. I shall confine myself to two. Both are stories of love gone wrong, of everything eventually coming right, and the parties living happily ever afterwards. From these examples my readers must form their own conclusions, and decide whether the desert man differs greatly from his Western brother. In both cases I knew the young actors intimately.

(*a*) *The love-story of Mutlug ibn Majid al A'sga of the Al Shuqair section of the Mutair.*

Young Mutlug was a shaikh's son of eighteen, well bred, good-looking, debonair, wiry and with a pair of long plaits (*gurun*) hanging down along both cheeks, that might have been the envy of any woman. He was an extraordinarily bright and happy lad, and on the last occasion when he came up to Kuwait, he had asked to be shown all over my house. His remark when he saw my wife's and my bedroom was characteristic, "*Wallah*" (by God) he said, "this sleeping

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581 chamber is better than that of 'Abdul 'Aziz himself (meaning the King), and Nura his sister has got nothing so nice, *wallah* I speak truth for I have seen them both".

Well, young Mutlug spent a week in Kuwait, while his father was being medically treated in the American Mission hospital. He left with my blessing and some useful gifts from my wife: little did we know what was in store for him. Six months later his father and uncle, one Turki ibn Shuqair, came up to Kuwait and visited me. "Where is Mutlug and why have you not brought him with you?" were my first words. "Alas," they said, "he has gone mad" (*mukhabal*). "How! mad?" said I, "a strong healthy lad like that doesn't go mad— it surely cannot be." "Yes, he has gone stark, staring mad," was the reply, "and all for the love of a young Mutairi maiden whom he met among the camels." "Then why not let him marry her if he is in such a bad case?" said I. "Alas, it cannot be," chorused both father and uncle, "she is the young wife of the terrible 'Abdullah ibn Jiluwi, Amir of Hasa, he married her a year ago and now allows her to live with her parents in the tribe: were he even now to hear that our Mutlug had fallen in love with his wife, his rage would know no bounds."

In reply to my many questions as to the degree of madness that had overcome the boy, I was told that he would not eat, nor talk, nor recognise anyone. It was said by some in the tribe that it was not the love of the woman that had caused his madness, but that he had walked over a grave during the night by accident, and that a *jinn* from the grave had seized upon him and possessed him. They had therefore tried branding him on the head, neck and back, but all without success, and at that moment he was in charge of a wise old woman who had promised to get rid of the spell from him for a sum of money, by reading over him certain passages from the Qur'an by day and night. I ventured the opinion that the matter was one of wild and frantic love pure and simple, and that they must get the boy properly married, or he might really go mad. "*Yimkin*" (perhaps) they said, and refused to pursue the subject further. My advice was indeed taken later, but in a somewhat strange way. They married the love-sick and now lightheaded boy to the sister of his lady love. Turki later told me that she was very like her younger sister in tem-

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perament, and almost her double in looks, so the boy surely ought 58| to be entirely satisfied. After all, being mad, he would not know the difference. The boy meekly obeyed his parents, and did show some improvement, but he was not really satisfied—far from it. Turki came and told me the details with undisguised pleasure two months later —but I knew that the boy Mutlug still pined grievously for his maiden of the camels.

I heard this from the women. Later I heard that, seized by a strange determination, he in a sane moment gave out that he was going to Hufuf to tell Ibn Jiluwi of his love. In vain they tried to prevent him, and only fate stepped in and saved him. In the autumn of 1935, just as Mutlug was setting out, the Amir of Hasa died very suddenly. I have not seen young Mutlug again, but they tell me he went wild with delight at the news, repaired to Riyadh and at once begged a boon from the King. "Give me, O King, the hand of 'Abdullah ibn Jiluwi's young Mutairi wife," he cried. "I have loved and wanted her for three years, and I shall die, O 'Abdul 'Aziz, if thou give her not to me." The King with his usual acumen realised how matters stood, and acted both generously and promptly. He told the boy he could have the young widow to wife, after the prescribed number of mourning days, and the marriage was consummated in due course.

Mutlug to-day is a happy man once more. May he keep his wife for many a long year.*

(*b*) *The Wooing of Shaikh Mutlug al Sur*

Mutlug al Sur was a poor but famous 'Ikhwan leader of the Mutair. A young, fiery man and entirely absorbed in his religion, he never thought to be so foolish as to be carried away by a pretty face or a pair of dark eyes. These he hoped to get in the next world and in plenty. The present life was to be devoted to converting the heathen and the infidel and bringing them into the right way. His zeal had brought him to the notice of the great Faisal al Duwish and of the King himself. He was given many independent commands, and entrusted with such tasks as the attack on Busaiya post. He carried out his work so well, that at the time this story begins, he had become

* Later, Mutlug came to Kuwait in 1936, and now is attached to H.H. the Shaikh's staff. Note made on 8.5.37.

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581 the right-hand man of Al Duwish, and his confidential friend and adviser.

One day about 1920, he met his fate: a happy and merry-eyed lass of his section of the Mutair, the Bura'asa. He too found her among the camels and loved her at first sight. She had no father but a very business-like and obstructive mother. Mutlug had of course heard many times of the beauty of the girl, but had paid no heed. He was a warrior of warriors and love-foolishness was not for him.

Cupid's dart had struck home, however, and he was not slow to act. He applied to the girl's mother for her hand—but she refused. He tried every subterfuge without success. The mother was full of avarice. She insisted on five she-camels and five hundred rials as her daughter's price. This he couldn't produce. He next tried sending other women direct to the girl herself, hoping to win her with gifts of nose-rings, bangles, necklaces, etc., such as Badawin girls love. All to no purpose, the miserable mother persuaded her daughter to think as she did. It was the money and five she-camels or nothing. In vain he sent her pretty frocks, veils, *'abbas*, etc., all to no purpose.

The maid's laughing eyes haunted him, he could not sleep, his warrior instincts were being undermined, he was becoming soft. At length, with a "To hell with all women and their bewitching ways", he took himself away, and went off to do battle with al Rashid near Hail. "Let me die," he said, "at least a warrior, rather than become the slave of a silly maiden."

Fight and war as he would, however, he could not forget Merry-eyes. Two years went by and he visited his home again. To his undoing he met the girl early one morning in the desert with the camels. He drew near with a welcome cry. She cast her eyes down, and to his enquiry if she had no words for him, she said in a half whisper—"Hast thou come with the money and the five she-camels?—if thou hast I am thine for the asking".

"Thou cruel tantaliser, no," he replied. "Nor shalt thou ever have thy accursed camels." Again he went away, this time for four long years, determined to forget his little Merry-eyes. Alas, he could not. At last, thin, weary and broken with hardships he decided to go to 'Abdul 'Aziz the King and tell him of his heartache. "Give me, O 'Abdul 'Aziz, the wherewithal to buy me this temptress for, *wallah*,

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she is hurting me sore, and I grow old before my time. Was not 581 ●
woman made for man? Give me what thou wilt, but help me to attain my desire." The understanding Bin Sa'ud, than whom no man knows woman better, gave Mutlug a very valuable *'umaniyah dhalúl* (thoroughbred riding camel from Oman), one of his very best. The camel even had a silver ring in her nose to prove her worth. He gave him also a present of Rs.200 and several extra-gaudy woman's garments. "Go now, my son, and win the lady," said the King, "and tell her 'Abdul 'Aziz himself begs this favour of her, and has sent her of his best." Mutlug duly repaired to the tents of his lady love in the Summán, and behold as he drew near her tent she saw him coming from far, and her heart went out to him. Did he not deserve to win her after all these years! Yet where were the five she-camels? Nearer he approached and nearer, and then the understanding girl saw and recognised the beautifully caparisoned *dhalúl* he was riding. There was the King's own brand on her, and the silver ring in her nose. She rushed forth crying "Mutlug has come for me, Mutlug has come". Oblivious of everything she fell softly into his arms. No one was looking, and they were hidden behind the *qdta*. Her mother no longer counted. Mutlug told me afterwards that their long embrace lasted a whole half-hour, and during that time he never once removed his lips from hers! It was his final homecoming. He had won the fairest rose in Arabia. They married shortly afterwards and she bore him a child, but to his unspeakable sorrow she died a year later. He will never love again, says Mutlug bitterly.